



## LESSON PLAN

**Level:** Grades 4-8  
**About the Author:** MediaSmarts

# Kids, Alcohol and Advertising: Young Drinkers

## Overview

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In this lesson, students learn why the alcohol industry needs replacement (new) drinkers and how it exploits the needs and desires of young people in order to foster brand loyalty. The lesson begins with a quiz about tobacco and alcohol, followed by class discussion on the alcohol industry and the rules surrounding alcohol advertising in Canada. The work sheet *Facts about Young Drinkers* provides students with up-to-date statistics on alcohol consumption by young people, and can stimulate a class discussion about why kids drink. In the activity *Whaddaya Say!* students compare what alcohol companies say about their advertising campaigns with the opinions of researchers, child development experts and educators. As a homework assignment, students develop their own frameworks for alcohol advertising.

## Learning Outcomes

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Students will demonstrate

an awareness of:

- the similarities and differences between alcohol and tobacco and the advertising laws that apply to each
- the drinking habits of Canadian and American kids and teens
- the alcohol industry in Canada

an understanding of:

- the consequences of alcohol and tobacco use

a beginning awareness of:

- the codes and guidelines that govern alcohol advertising in Canada
- the ethical considerations surrounding alcohol advertising
- why young people are a potentially vulnerable group when it comes to alcohol advertising

## Preparation and Materials

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- Prepare the *Tobacco and Alcohol Quiz* as a handout or an overhead
- Prepare the overheads *Facts about Young Drinkers* and *Whaddaya Say!*
- For the first extension activity, prepare the overhead *You Be the Judge*
- For the extension activity for older students, photocopy the article *Ad Hangover?*



## Procedure

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For older grades, distribute the *Tobacco and Alcohol Quiz*. Once students have completed the questions, take up their answers. (Teachers of younger grades might prefer to create an overhead of this quiz and present it to students one question at a time.)

### Class Discussion

As we found out in the quiz, in Canada the alcohol industry doesn't face the same advertising restrictions as tobacco producers. While tobacco companies aren't allowed to advertise their products in the media or through sponsoring sporting and arts events, alcohol companies *are* allowed to advertise alcoholic beverages to *adults*.

- Why do you think alcohol companies can advertise but tobacco companies can't?

The logic here is that moderate alcohol consumption will not endanger your health, whereas there is no such thing as "safe" smoking levels. But we all know that many health risks are associated with alcohol consumption. (Have students brainstorm the negative health effects of drinking.)

- Given these health concerns, do you think alcohol companies should be allowed to advertise? (Take a show of hands.) Why or why not?
- How much money do you think alcohol companies spend on advertising every year in Canada? (*Over \$160 million.*) In the United States? (*\$2 billion – with over half of this amount going to beer advertising.*)

This is a lot of money, but alcohol companies and government liquor stores make lots of money. (*In the twelve months ending in March 2012, alcohol sales in Canada totaled \$20.9 billion. Of this amount, the provincial and territorial governments received roughly \$6 billion.*) Alcohol companies can advertise to adults, but not to kids and teens. But research has shown that despite this restriction, many young people start drinking at a young age.

- Can you think of any reasons why younger kids are drinking?

Place *Facts about Young Drinkers* on the overhead projector, digital whiteboard or data projector and review and discuss each of the points with students. (Teachers of younger grades may want to draw pie charts on the board to help students put the following percentages into perspective visually: 62 per cent of Grades 7-12 students in Ontario drink alcohol; 28 per cent of Ontario Grade 7 students have tried alcohol; 47 per cent of American Grade 8 students have tried alcohol.)

Ask students:

- Why do you think kids and teens might be a vulnerable group when it comes to alcohol and alcohol advertising? (Young kids lack the experience to question the positive depictions of drinking that are promoted in popular culture. Many *adolescents want to appear more "grown up"; are curious and want to try out new situations; are at a time in their lives when they are exploring and pushing boundaries; and are actively seeking the approval of their peers.*)
- What might be some of the reasons kids and teens drink? (*Answers may include: to relax, to be more confident in social situations, to reduce stress and worry, to feel more powerful, to be accepted by their friends, to look older and cool.*)



Let's go back for a minute to advertising. We know that alcohol companies are allowed to advertise alcoholic beverages. Can you think of some ways they do this? (Have students brainstorm all the ways in which alcoholic beverages are advertised. The list should include formal advertisements such as magazine, television, radio and billboard advertising, and "informal" advertising through Web sites, store promotions, clothing, accessories and sponsoring of sports and arts events.)

- Are there any rules or laws in Canada that apply to alcohol advertising? Can you think of any? (*Canadian law forbids advertising messages that could harm young people. Messages can't influence non-drinkers to drink; can't appeal to underage teens; can't mix drinking with high-risk activities; can't imply that drinking will make you successful, popular or athletic.*) (For teachers who wish to explore these regulations in detail, see the CRTC Code for Broadcast Advertising of Alcoholic Beverages <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/GENERAL/CODES/ALCOHOL.HTM> and the Summary of Provincial Guidelines [http://www.apolnet.ca/resources/pubs/rpt\\_AdImpactYouthExh2.pdf](http://www.apolnet.ca/resources/pubs/rpt_AdImpactYouthExh2.pdf).)
- Who makes these rules? (*In Canada alcohol companies are guided by voluntary industry codes, provincial/territorial guidelines and regulations, and broadcasting codes.*)

Although there's no conclusive evidence that alcohol advertising causes kids and teens to drink, researchers have concluded that, combined with other factors, it does, for some kids, have a positive effect on expectations and knowledge about drinking and intentions to drink. And there's little doubt that messages about alcohol in the media reinforce the idea that drinking is a normal, desirable part of life – and a normal passage into adulthood for teens. In fact, when asked about teen drinking most kids think young people drink much more than they really do because that's what the media would have us believe.

Let's take a look at what the alcohol industry tells us about its advertising strategies and compare this with some counter-arguments from researchers, health practitioners and educators.

Place the overhead *Whaddaya Say!* onto the projector or digital whiteboard. Go through the three main points made by alcohol companies, covering the corresponding comments by researchers. Ask students to provide their own counter-arguments before reviewing the experts' responses.

### **Class Activity: You Be the Judge**

We're now going to look at some alcohol-related ads and products. (Put *You Be the Judge* onto the projector or digital whiteboard.) Decide whether or not they would appeal to kids and teens. (Ask students to debate each item and have note-takers record their reasons in point form on the board. Once completed, review the main points that were made – especially those regarding strategies that would attract kids.)

### **Homework**

- If you were responsible for making the rules for alcohol advertising in Canada, what would they be?
- List each of your rules and explain the reasoning behind them.

### **Extension Activity (Grades 7 and 8)**

Have students read the article *Ad Hangover?* and respond to the questions.



## Tobacco and Alcohol Quiz

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Answer the following questions, true or false:

1. More kids and teens have tried alcohol than have tried cigarettes. True False
2. Alcohol is more addictive than tobacco. True False
3. Alcohol and tobacco are drugs. True False
4. Forty per cent of deaths from motor vehicle accidents are caused by alcohol. True False
5. Thirty-five thousand people in Canada die every year because of tobacco and alcohol use. True False
6. Health warnings must be featured on all alcoholic beverages. True False
7. In Canada, tobacco companies are allowed to advertise in magazines, but they're not allowed to advertise on TV, radio or billboards. True False
8. Alcohol companies are allowed to openly sponsor sports and arts events, but tobacco companies are not allowed to do this. True False
9. Both tobacco and alcohol companies need to attract new customers in order to survive. True False
10. In general, advertising has a greater impact on young people than on adults. True False



## Tobacco and Alcohol Quiz

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### Answers

1. **True.** Studies have consistently shown that more young people have tried alcohol than cigarettes.
2. **False.** Although alcohol can be addictive, tobacco (through nicotine) is considered to be a more addictive drug.
3. **True.** Both alcohol and nicotine are classified as drugs. (Alcohol is a depressant that affects your body's central nervous system. Nicotine is an organic compound that has potent effects on the human body.)
4. **True.** According to MADD\* Canada, alcohol plays a role in forty per cent of deaths in Canada resulting from motor vehicle accidents.
5. **False.** Unfortunately, this statistic is too low. According to Health Canada, over 45,000 deaths a year in Canada are caused by smoking. Over 8,000 Canadians lose their lives as a result of alcohol consumption.
6. **False.** Health warnings must appear on tobacco products, but not on alcohol products.
7. **False.** Tobacco companies are permitted to advertise only through direct mailings to adults and in-store displays.
8. **True.** Alcohol companies may openly sponsor sports and arts events, while tobacco companies may not promote their brands or products through the sponsoring of sports and arts events.
9. **True.** As customers literally die off, both tobacco and alcohol companies need replacement smokers and drinkers in order to support their industries.
10. **True.** Young people who lack the life experience to challenge advertising messages are more likely to make positive associations with products that are being advertised.

\*Mothers Against Drunk Driving



## Facts about Young Drinkers

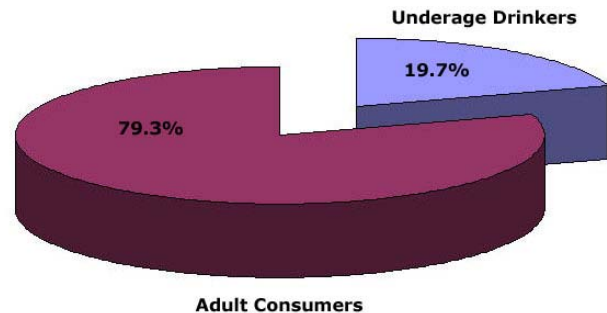
Here are some facts and statistics researchers have discovered about kids and teens who drink:

- In a 2004 study, 62.3 per cent of Canadian teens ages 15-17 reported having consumed alcohol in the past year and 44.7 per cent admitted to drinking 1-3 times a month. 28.8 per cent of 15-17-year-olds who drank admitted drinking five or more drinks in one sitting.<sup>1</sup>

Did you know...

Underage drinkers make lots of money for the alcohol industry!

They consume 19.7 per cent of the alcohol sold in the United States.<sup>2</sup> (Favourite choice? Beer.)



Do the math...

### <15 X 4 = Alcohol Problems

- Teenagers who start drinking before the age of 15 are **four times** more likely to become addicted to alcohol than those who don't drink until they're 21 or older.<sup>3</sup>
- The kids **most** at risk for a lifetime of problems with alcohol are those who start drinking between the ages of 11 and 14.<sup>4</sup>
- The number of Grade 12 students who say they've had five or more drinks in one sitting in the last month ranges from 40 per cent (Alberta) to 55 per cent (Newfoundland).<sup>5</sup>
- "Twenty years of research has shown that exposure to alcohol advertising is linked to increased drinking if a young person already drinks and to starting drinking if a young person has not yet begun to drink."<sup>6</sup>

Other facts...

- Sixty-six per cent of Ontario students from Grades 7-12 drink alcohol each year.<sup>7</sup>
- Twenty-eight per cent of Ontario Grade 7 students have had alcohol in the last year.<sup>8</sup> (In the U.S. 50 per cent of fifteen-year-olds have tried alcohol.)<sup>9</sup>

And the final fact?

Alcohol often plays a role in the four leading causes of death among 16-25-year-olds: in 2003, 40 per cent of crash deaths among 16-19-year-olds and 50 per cent among 20-25-year-olds were alcohol-related.<sup>10</sup>

1 E. Adlaf, P. Begin and E. Sawka eds., Canadian Addiction Survey (CAS): Detailed Report (Ottawa: Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, 2005)

2 "Underage and Adult Excessive Drinking Accounts for Half of U.S. Alcohol Sales," press release, February 25, 2003. National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University <<http://www.casacolumbia.org/absolutenm/templates/PressReleases.asp?articleid=262&zoneid=46>>.

- 3 "Teen Tipplers: America's Underage Drinking Problem," 2003. National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University.
- 4 National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, February 25, 2003.
- 5 Young, Matthew M. "Cross-Canada Report on Student Alcohol and Drug Use." Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, 2011.
- 6 Giesbrecht, N., Wettlaufer, A., April, N., Asbridge, M., Cukier, S., Mann, R., McAllister, J., Murie, A., Plamondon, L., Stockwell, T., Thomas, G., Thompson, K., & Vallance, K. (2013). *Strategies to Reduce Alcohol-Related Harms and Costs in Canada: A Comparison of Provincial Policies*. Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, p. 32.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Alert No. 73, October 2007. <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/AA73/AA73.htm>
- 10 Statistics Canada, *Annual Demographic Statistics 2004* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2005). Catalogue No. 91-213 and Transport Canada, *Canadian Motor Vehicle Traffic Collision Statistics 2004* (Ottawa: Transport Canada, 2005).
- 11 Jernigan, D.H., Ostroff, J., Ross, C., O'Hara, J.A. (2004). Sex differences in adolescent exposure to alcohol advertising in magazines. *Achieves of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*,

## Whaddaya Say!

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### Alcohol companies say...

"We're not looking for new drinkers, we're just trying to convince people who already drink to switch brands."

"We want people to drink responsibly."

"We don't advertise to kids and teens."

### Researchers and others say...

The alcohol industry needs new drinkers because the drinking population is aging, consumption is dropping and brand competition is getting fiercer. If alcohol companies don't attract young drinkers, they will continue the downhill track they've been on for the past 20 years.

In reality, alcohol companies need heavy drinkers because they are the ones who support the industry. Heavy drinkers represent 10 per cent of the drinking-age population, yet they consume over 60 per cent of the alcohol.

In Canada, 15 per cent of youth between 15 and 24 are high-risk drinkers. This group is also needed by the industry.

In addition, although the social responsibility campaigns created by alcohol companies emphasize moderate drinking, their advertising campaigns often promote an entirely different message – that drinking is a fun, desirable and normal part of life.

Just as the industry relies on heavy drinkers, it also needs to recruit young people. Developing brand loyalty at an early age guarantees life-time customers.

Alcohol companies spend billions of dollars each year placing ads in magazines, radio programs and television shows that have large youth audiences. For example, alcohol companies in the United States spent 590.4 million US dollars to place alcohol advertisements in magazines in 2001 and 2002. The net effect on underage youth was that in 2002 they saw 45% more beer and ale advertising, 12% more distilled spirits advertising, 65% more low-alcohol refresher advertising and 69% less advertising for wine than persons 21 years and older.<sup>11</sup>

Don Cherry's "Bubba o'Beer", rappers like Diddy and interactive webpages are just a few ways that alcohol marketers reach kids and teens. Alcopops – alcoholic drinks flavoured to taste like soft drinks – are seen as often by youth ages 12-20 as by adults ages 21 to 35: teenage girls see almost twice as many alcopop ads as women over 21.

All advertising targets the desires, interests and needs of specific groups of people. When it comes to teens and young adults, there is little difference between the wants and desires of a 15 year-old and those of a 21 year-old. Because of this, alcohol ads that would appeal to young adults will also appeal to underage drinkers.



## You Be the Judge

Which of these alcohol-related products would appeal mostly to adults and which ones would appeal mostly to kids and teens? How can you tell?



## Ad hangover?

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By Allyce Bess

*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, December 18, 2003

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Alcohol marketers face a conundrum: how to market to 21-year-olds without influencing teenagers.

While critics have said for years that the alcohol industry deliberately targets teens, the industry says its advertising is not only lawful, but also not a significant factor in kids' decisions about drinking.

"We could turn off every television set in America, and we would have done zero to fight underage drinking," said Francine Katz, vice president of corporate communications for Anheuser-Busch Cos. "When you ask youths what their primary influences are, they rank advertising dead last."

Now, a sweeping lawsuit accuses several market leaders in the alcohol industry of engaging in a "long-running, sophisticated and deceptive scheme" to capture the "hearts and wallets" of young consumers before they can drink legally.

Filed last month in Washington on behalf of a plastic surgeon living there, the suit seeks class action status as well as compensation for parents whose children drink. It also seeks a ban on advertising found to target underage consumers on behalf of a separate class of parents, whose children are exposed to the advertising.

St. Louis-based Anheuser-Busch is not among those named in the suit.

But the suit alleges that companies, including Bacardi Ltd., Coors Brewing Co. and Heineken NV, are making billions of dollars a year in unlawful revenue by using cartoons depicting juvenile behaviour and paying for product placements in movies disproportionately seen by people who are younger than 21.

Other companies named in the suit include Diageo PLC, which makes Captain Morgan brands of rum and is the world's largest producer of alcoholic drinks, and Mike's Hard Lemonade Co.

"It presents an excellent beginning for a broadening series of litigation attacks on the marketing of alcoholic beverages," said George Hacker, director of the Alcohol Policies Project of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a consumer advocacy group in Washington that has accused the industry of irresponsible marketing. "I think it's well-crafted, well-reasoned and, conceivably, well-financed."

Alan Howard, a professor at St. Louis University School of Law, doubts that the suit will succeed. He points to a Supreme Court ruling in 2001 that found a Massachusetts regulation, which would have banned tobacco advertising near school playgrounds, unconstitutional.

The Straus & Boies lawsuit criticizes liquor companies for advertising in magazines such as *Spin* and *Stuff*. But banning alcohol ads from those publications might be a First Amendment violation, Howard said.

Alcohol is highly visible these days. Commercials for hard liquor are proliferating on cable television, and beer companies are warring over carbohydrate-conscious consumers.



In recent years, a flood of flavoured, malt beverages has entered the market. It was those beverages, dubbed "alco-pops" by critics that spurred Congress this year to commission studies from the Federal Trade Commission and the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies on a possible link between advertising and underage drinking.

The institute, a health-policy advisory center, found that underage drinking is a public health problem that costs the nation \$53 billion a year.

Janet Evans, an attorney with the Federal Trade Commission, was chief author of the FTC's report, issued in September. It did not find fault with the industry, but it raised concerns about how many underage people might be exposed to alcohol ads.

"There could well be a spillover effect," Evans said in an interview. "It's hard to believe you'd develop (an ad) campaign for 21-year-olds without having an effect on 19- or 20-year-olds."

Around the time the FTC issued its report, the Beer Institute and the Distilled Spirits Council, both trade groups, vowed that their members would limit advertising to outlets where only 30 percent of the potential audience is underage, down from a previous 50 percent standard. Katz said Anheuser-Busch advertises only in outlets where 25 percent of the possible audience might be underage.

Heineken, Coors and Bacardi said their marketing is responsible. A spokesman at Heineken USA Inc. said the company contributes to efforts that limit underage drinking.

Katz said Anheuser-Busch and its wholesalers have spent about \$430 million since 1982 to combat underage drinking. Over the years, A-B has developed commercials and print ads—separate from its regular advertising - urging retailers to check IDs, promoting designated-driver programs and encouraging parents to talk with children about the dangers of underage drinking. Still, without listing specific examples, the lawsuit even goes after those types of efforts, which it says are "in truth, designed to have, and in fact do have, the opposite effect."

Regardless of the merits of the suit, advocacy groups say the link between marketing and underage drinking is still an open question.

"The issue for the industry when it comes to advertising ... is: are they doing all they can to restrict their appeal to an underage audience?" said Jim O'Hara, executive director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University, which keeps an archive of alcohol advertisements and tracks where they are placed.

"The message of this lawsuit ... is that by not providing leadership, the industry has brought it on itself," O'Hara said.

## Questions

1. According to this article, what is the main problem faced by alcohol companies when it comes to advertising?
2. Do you agree or disagree that alcohol ads designed for 21-year-olds might also appeal to teens? Why or why not?
3. List four arguments used by the alcohol industry to prove that they don't intentionally target young people.
4. List the reasons why the lawyers and advocacy groups believe alcohol companies are intentionally influencing young people.



5. According to this article, alcohol companies consider it reasonable to market their products in films, shows and magazines where one-quarter to one-third of the audience is underage. Do you think this is acceptable? Why or why not?
6. Efforts to limit alcohol advertising in the U.S. have often failed because courts have ruled they violate First Amendment rights – the rights that permit freedom of speech. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms also includes freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression as a fundamental freedom. Do you think alcohol advertising – even advertising that may encourage young people to drink – would fall under the rights of freedom of expression? Explain your answer.
7. "The issue for the industry when it comes to advertising ... is: are they doing all they can to restrict their appeal to an underage audience?" What measures might the alcohol industry take to ensure that young people aren't influenced by their ads?
8. In this article, there is much debate about whether or not the drinking behaviour of young people is influenced by alcohol advertising. Do you agree or disagree that alcohol advertising influences a young person's decision to drink? Provide reasons in your answer.

